

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 76

February 22, 1995, 7:14 p.m.
Page S-2948 Temp. Record

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT/No Cuts in Certain Veterans Programs

SUBJECT: A Resolution Proposing a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution of the United States . . . H.J. Res. 1. Hatch motion to table the Rockefeller amendment No. 306.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 62-33

SYNOPSIS: Pertinent votes on this legislation include Nos. 62-63, 65-75, and 77-98.

As passed by the House, H. J. Res. 1, a resolution proposing a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution, is virtually identical to the balanced budget constitutional amendment that was considered last year by the Senate (see 103d Congress, second session, vote Nos. 47-48). The resolution: will require a three-fifths majority vote of both Houses of Congress to deficit spend or to increase the public debt limit; will require the President's annual proposed budget submission to be in balance; and will require a majority of the whole number of each House to approve any bill to increase revenue. Congress will be allowed to waive these requirements for any fiscal year in which a declaration of war is in effect. Congress will enforce and implement this amendment by appropriate legislation. The amendment will take effect in fiscal year 2002 or with the second fiscal year beginning after its ratification, whichever is later. The States will have 7 years to ratify the amendment.

The Rockefeller amendment would add the following, "However, no legislation to enforce or implement this Article may impair any payment or other benefit based upon a death or disability incurred in, or aggravated by, service in the Armed Forces if such payment or other benefit was earned under a program established before the ratification of this Article."

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Hatch moved to table the Rockefeller motion. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

Argument 1:

(See other side)

YEAS (62)			NAYS (33)		NOT VOTING (5)	
Republicans (50 or 100%)	Democrats (12 or 27%)		Republicans (0 or 0%)	Democrats (33 or 73%)	Republicans (3)	Democrats (2)
Abraham	Jeffords	Campbell		Akaka	Bond ⁻²	Heflin ⁻²
Ashcroft	Kassebaum	Exon		Baucus	Hatfield ^{-2AY}	Johnston ⁻²
Bennett	Kempthorne	Feingold		Biden	Inhofe ⁻²	
Brown	Kyl	Graham		Bingaman		
Burns	Lott	Harkin		Boxer		
Chafee	Lugar	Hollings		Bradley		
Coats	Mack	Kerrey		Breaux		
Cochran	McCain	Kohl		Bryan		
Cohen	McConnell	Lieberman		Bumpers		
Coverdell	Murkowski	Nunn		Byrd		
Craig	Nickles	Robb		Conrad		
D'Amato	Packwood	Simon		Daschle		
DeWine	Pressler			Dodd		
Dole	Roth			Dorgan		
Domenici	Santorum			Feinstein		
Faircloth	Shelby			Ford		
Frist	Simpson					
Gorton	Smith					
Gramm	Snowe					
Grams	Specter					
Grassley	Stevens					
Gregg	Thomas					
Hatch	Thompson					
Helms	Thurmond					
Hutchison	Warner					

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

1—Official Business
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:

AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

One would think that it may have dawned on our colleagues by now that the ruse of claiming that the most popular programs in the budget will be drastically cut when the benefits of programs are weighed against each other under a balanced budget amendment simply will not work. The particular programs our colleagues have chosen this time are programs for disabled and injured veterans. Damaging the Constitution with statutory language to protect programs that need no protection simply makes no sense. Accordingly, we urge our colleagues to table the Rockefeller amendment.

Argument 2:

Senators need to be aware of exactly the type of benefits for which they are being asked to provide constitutional protection. Service-connected disabilities and injuries no longer strictly relate to such items as prosthetics for limbs lost in warfare or lingering illnesses from jungle diseases. Instead, a long list of 93 items, ranging from ulcers, to stress, to hypertension, to high blood pressure, to lupus are presumptively considered to be service-connected disabilities. This list has grown each year precisely because each year Congress has scrambled to show its appreciation for veterans by increasing their benefits. In 1978, the veterans budget was \$20 billion. For 1996, it will be \$39.8 billion. Members are supportive of veterans, and, lest they ever forget, several extremely well-organized and active veterans lobbies will be quick to remind them. We agree that these programs need no protection, and we add that the benefits that are being provided are far more generous than most Members imagine, and are far greater than previous levels of benefits. Therefore, we urge the tabling of this amendment.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

The benefits that the Rockefeller amendment would protect from reductions caused by the balanced budget amendment are at the core of the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The principal mission of the Department is to ensure that we, as a Nation, honor the commitments we have made to those who were injured or disabled while defending us. Too often, these commitments which were signed with the blood of American servicemen are lumped together with other obligations of Government as though all obligations are equal. Clearly they are not. Clearly, those Americans who have served in the Armed Forces and have been injured in the defense of the country deserve better treatment. Even if Senators are unwilling to recognize that this priority is a greater moral priority than all other priorities, including balancing the budget, they should at least be willing to recognize that it is the greatest priority on a pragmatic level. If America is unwilling to honor its commitments to those who have been injured or disabled defending it, few people will be willing to serve in the Armed Forces in the future.

Whether this amendment is adopted or not our vote on final passage of this resolution will be unaffected. Either way, we will vote in opposition. However, if we are going to amend the Constitution in the name of fiscal policy in the mindless way that is proposed, then at a minimum we should ensure that disabled veterans and their survivors are protected in that same action. Senators who say that they have no intention of cutting veterans benefits are sincere, but the only way we can be certain that benefits will not be cut is by voting for the Rockefeller amendment. We therefore oppose the motion to table.